



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 14, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-047

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of July 23, 2009

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – Casa de la Torre**

APPLICANT: Dittamore Family Trust, owner; represented by Legacy 106

LOCATION: 4145 Miller Street, Uptown Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of Casa de la Torre located at 4145 Miller Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate Casa de la Torre located at 4145 Miller Street (excluding additions to the property in 1986, the seating area and at the rear of the courtyard, and the garage building), as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Eclectic style; and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1927.



BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The subject property, located at 4145 Miller Street in Inspiration Heights, was constructed in the Spanish Eclectic style and embodies distinctive character defining features of the style including a low-pitch red tile roof; stucco exterior finish, arched arcade, elaborated entry, prominent tower, and extensive detailing. Construction was completed on the residence in 1927 by Quality Building and Securities Company, as identified in the Notice of Completion.

The historic name of the resource, Casa de la Torre, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy as it takes the historic name as it may have been established by the original owners, and it is the name indicated on the plaque adjacent to the front door which appears to have been placed there at the time of construction.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Legacy 106, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B, C, and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion C, but not Criteria B and D, as follows:

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

The applicant's report states that the property is significant under HRB Criterion B for its association with Berma and Elsie Bonham. The Bonhams, along with Berma's brother Harley Bonham are known as the founders of the Bonham Brothers Band, which recruited local boys, aged 11 to 18, to perform as part of a brass band for parades and events nationwide. More than 2,000 boys graduated through the program between the formation of the band in 1926 and its final year 1962, at which time the program was essentially replaced when high schools began developing marching bands of their own. Many graduates of the band went on to successful musical careers as a result of their early training. Staff does believe that the Bonham Brothers Band, and its founders, may be significant as part of local history for its contributions to the social welfare and musical education of the bands participants. However, the subject property, as the home of Berma and Elsie Bonham, does not appear to be the property that most closely represents the contributions of the Band and its founders. The consultant report identifies the 3610 6th Avenue and the American Legion Hall at 4061 Fairmount Avenue (HRB Site #525) as the locations where the band practiced in its early years before it established a location at 1770 4th Avenue. Staff feels that the locations where the musical lessons and band practices were held better represent the social contributions of the band and its founders.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The property is a 3,798 square foot house with a U-shape plan and a detached garage designed in the Spanish Eclectic style, resting on a concrete foundation. The house is two stories and features

a low-pitch cross gabled roof with red clay roof tiles. The roof extends on the front facade to cover a nearly full width arched colonnade which terminates at a prominent two story tower element at the southwest corner of the house. The colonnade features six arched openings looking onto Miller Street; and a seventh arch that forms a porte cochere. Attention to detail in the colonnade is apparent in the exposed wood ceiling beams with painted stenciling; intricately scored concrete floor; and elaborated arched entry with a wide multi-paneled wood door surrounded by false quoins. Multi-light wood casement windows and French doors look onto the colonnade from the living and dining rooms. The six-sided two story tower features single light fixed pane windows at the first floor level, and arched top single light fixed and operable windows at the second floor level. A Moorish stucco detail is present between the first and second floor windows. A wide concrete stairway leads from the sidewalk to the entry colonnade, which is raised several feet above street level. A low stucco retaining wall is present at sidewalk level and rises with the steps to the colonnade.

The south elevation of the house faces the neighboring property and is largely obscured by mature plantings and the rise in elevation. This side of the house is accessed by a wrought iron gate located adjacent to the tower which leads through a stucco wall into the side yard. This elevation comprises the two story portion of the house, extending back from the tower nearly to the rear property line. Multi-light wood frame casement windows and wood French and glass panel doors are present on the first and second floor. A large wood deck is present at the second level and provides shade and cover at the ground level below.

The rear of the house is not visible from the street. This area forms a courtyard enclosed by the U shape of house. This courtyard is paved with diagonally laid Spanish tile and features notable details such as a blue tile inset depicting a Spanish sailing ship on the stucco chimney, flanked by wood and glass French doors with four-light arched transoms above. A large seating area with a trellis and fountain are present at the opposite end. Other windows and doors in the rear courtyard area are wood multi-light casements and wood and glass panel doors. A wood balcony accessed from the rear of the second floor provides a view into the courtyard.

The north side elevation of the house is accessed from the rear courtyard, or from the porte cochere off of Miller Street. This elevation fronts on the driveway and features multi-pane casement windows and a quatrefoil detail in the gable end. The detached garage is also present in this area, at the northeast corner of the property. The extension of the garage on the south elevation is identified as a storage area on the residential building record and as a servant's quarters in the consultant report. A wide garage door provides access for cars from the driveway, and access to the storage/servant's quarters is provided through a wood door with three horizontally oriented glass lights in the upper panel.

The house and garage are finished in rough texture stucco, which is a departure from the smooth finish typically found in Spanish Eclectic style structures. The consultant report provides an analysis of the stucco, and concludes that the rough texture is historic. This is based on examination of the stucco texture of the historic portions of the house and retaining walls, which exhibit rough texture stucco applied over scratch coat and covered with several layers of paint, indicating that the stucco has been present for many years. Additionally, examination of the stucco on the areas of the house added in 1986 show that at that time there was an attempt to

match the historic rough texture; and while the rough texture itself was matched to a close degree, these areas exhibit a grittier surface not softened by age and repeated paintings. Staff conducted a field visit to the property, examined the stucco, and concurs with the analysis of the consultant that the rough stucco texture, though unusual, appears to be historic.

Modifications

Modifications to the main structure from its original 1927 configuration are outlined in the construction history of the consultant report and are summarized here. These modifications include the extension of the second floor along the south wing to bring it flush with the rear façade of the first floor, and the extension of the northeast corner adjacent to the driveway in 1986; and a replaced driveway in 2005. The outdoor trellis and seating area at rear courtyard area are not believed to be original to the property. These additions and elements should be excluded from the designation.

The garage building appears to be largely intact, however examination of the historical photos and the garage itself indicates that the face of the garage appears to have been extended approximately 2 feet, with a tile shed roof extension added. The residential building record dated 1957 indicates that the garage was accessed by an electric door opener, so it is possible that the garage extension and modernization of the garage door and opener occurred around this time. While the addition of approximately 2 feet of space at the front of the garage is a minor modification in size, the addition of a shed roof has modified the historic appearance of the garage. Examination of the historic photos provided shows that the garage historically exhibited an unusual parapet in front and high parapet surround at the rear. Staff believes that this modification has compromised the integrity of the garage building such that it should be excluded from the designation.

Interior

The property owner and consultant have also nominated interior features as part of the designation. The interior nomination includes the entry, tower room, and living room. The entry features a red painted concrete floor, scored to match the colonnade outside, false quoins surrounding the arched openings to adjacent rooms, faux painted block walls, and a coved ceiling. The tower room, accessed through the south opening, features a intricately lain wood floor echoing the octagonal shape of the room. Corinthian pilasters are present at the intersections of the wall planes and ribs extend from the top of the pilasters to the apex of the coved ceiling. An original arched top radio cabinet with intricate pipe organ style wood detailing is present on the east wall. This cabinet was discovered by the owners in the garage storage area and reinstalled in its original location.

The living room lies to the north of the entry vestibule and spans nearly the entire length of the colonnade outside. This room was painstakingly reconstructed by the current owners with the help of historic photographs. These photographs are provided in the consultant report. The wood floor displays an unusual diagonal orientation surrounded by an intricate perimeter pattern of light and dark woods terminating in knot patterns in the corners. The arched ceiling meets the walls of the living room with a series of small arches running the length of the east and west

elevations. The south wall of the living room features a large arched top inset bookshelf with ornate leaded glass and wood doors. Like the arched openings on either side, this bookshelf is surrounded by false quoins. The focal point on the adjacent east wall is a large fireplace which exhibits unusual plasterwork that replicates the appearance of masonry and tilework through faux painting and detailing. Flanking the fireplace are the previously described wood and glass doors that lead to the rear courtyard. The arched opening to the dining room on the north wall of the living rooms also features false quoins, as well as a wrought iron ornament also salvaged from the garage storage and returned to its original location by the current owners. This arched opening is flanked by two small arched inset niches with wood base shelves. The west wall of the living room is comprised of wood casement windows and French doors looking onto the colonnade.

The building embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style and retains a good degree of integrity from its 1927 period of significance. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

The applicant's report states that the property is significant under HRB Criterion D as the work of Quality Building and Securities Company, and proposes to establish the Company as a Master Builder with this nomination. Quality Building and Securities Company was established in 1925 by Ralphe and Olive Cox and L.A. Kennell, and quickly grew to include many prominent San Diego businessmen on its Board of Directors. The consultant report identifies and provides biographical information for the 15 men that comprised the Board. The Company is credited in the nomination with the construction of high quality homes in the Mission Hills, North Park, and Point Loma areas and newspaper advertisements are included in the report that provide some insight into the homes that were produced by the Company in these locations. Additionally, historic photographs are provided of the homes designed by the Company on Titus Street. Documentation is also provided on the first prize honor awarded to Quality Building and Securities Company for construction of the "most original and unique booth" during San Diego's first annual Better Homes Week, held in Balboa Park in 1927. The information presented is quite thorough in its presentation of biographical information on the Company, and is a good indication that the Company may qualify as a Master Builder, however staff feels that more information and analysis of the overall body of work of Quality Building and Securities Company is needed before the Company can be established as a Master. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

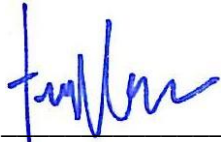
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The additions to the house in 1986, the seating area and trellis at the rear of the courtyard, and the garage building should be excluded from the designation.

Conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, staff recommends that the HRB designate the Casa de la Torre located at 4145 Miller Street (excluding additions to the property in 1986, the seating area and at the rear of the courtyard, and the garage building), as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C. Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives.



Tricia Olsen
Associate Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

TO/cw

Attachments: Draft Resolution
Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 7/23/2009

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 7/23/2009, to consider the historical designation of the **Casa de la Torre** (owned by Dittamore Family Trust, 4145 Miller Street, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **4145 Miller Street, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **443-563-08-00**, further described as Lots 8 & 9 in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Casa de la Torre on the following finding:

1. The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as a building that embodies distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style and embodies character defining features of the style including a low-pitch red tile roof; stucco exterior finish, arched arcade, elaborated entry, prominent tower, and extensive detailing; and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1927.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building excluding additions to the property in 1986, the seating area and at the rear of the courtyard, and the garage building; as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
NINA FAIN
Deputy City Attorney